



Memories are Treasures

BY KELLY CHERAMY

Opening the cedar chest of the mind brings personal joy and satisfaction to the owner, but memories and stories also offer powerful ways to connect with others. They can bridge the generations and underscore a shared experience or strengthen understanding of family and general humanity.

"Personal and family history, stories, and life experiences—memories—are priceless and irreplaceable gifts to friends and family," says Ann Massie Nelson of Life Media Messages, a Madison-based video storytelling

company that helps individuals, organizations, and small businesses preserve important narratives for the future. "An African proverb says that when an old man dies, a library burns down. And that's so true. If you don't share and preserve what matters to you, it might get lost when there's no one to keep telling the story."

The Five Senses are Powerful but Intangible Memory Triggers
Take the baking of bread, for example. It's seen by many as an unnecessary task in modern times, and by others as a traditional art that

holds much more value than fresh nutrients. For Pam Barnes of Mount Horeb, baking is her sole passion and a delicious way to preserve the fire of her family's heritage.

The recipes and knowledge started as farm-life necessity for her mother and aunts back in the early 1900s, but the traditions they spawned continue to bring the family together in a new century. Whether at funerals, anniversary celebrations, or family reunions, the next generations bring special dishes that their parents made. "We end

up talking about all the shared experiences and memories that are triggered by the food," Pam says. "Food is comfort. In fact, at the end of life there's one universal thing that appeals to people and that's a memory of food."

Pam experienced that firsthand when her father requested his favorite cake shortly before he died. Of course, Pam made the cake for him. "Baking something is very personal and can only be done with love," she says. To honor him and keep his memory alive, she continues to make her dad's favorite on Father's Day and his birthday.

Pam, who hosts solepassionbaker.com to share her love for baking, says it's never too late to start a new tradition. Something as simple as a favorite holiday cookie can become something the family looks forward to year after year. "Someday it will be a memory that your family will want to recreate for their own families, and tradition is born."

Photographs, Letters, and Souvenirs also Lead to Other Worlds Remembered

Snapshots of time and personal character blaze through pieces you can touch and examine or replay through recordings. Back in the mid-1970s, Attic Angel Community resident Marion Applegate took advantage of technology to record her parents telling about their lives and careers. As a history buff, she finds it fascinating to hear the personal contributions and experiences of people within the context of a bigger history. "I decided I wanted to preserve family history through their own words," she says. "It helps younger generations see where their roots are and connect more directly with their ancestors."

Family history and connectedness are revered among her relatives, and nothing symbolizes that more than La Dress—the 1948 satin wedding dress that has been worn by eight brides in three generations...and counting. "The dress became a tradition and now has a life of its own," Marion says.

Preserving memories and traditions is not a one-size-fits-all effort. Over the years, memorabilia accumulate, and only the memory keeper's deeply personal emotional connection can say what gets tossed and why other things live on in the cedar chest of the mind.

Photographs provided by Attic Angel Community.

Kelly Cheramy is the outreach coordinator for Attic Angel Community.



Honored Memories Take the Stage

Memorabilia can enjoy a useful, visible life as they honor personal and family memories in new and creative ways. Here are some ideas for putting your memories in a renewed spotlight.

- Draw or paint the people and scenes from your everyday life. In the future, this artful expression will tell more than you can know.
- Create pillows or wall art from old graphic t-shirts.
- Assemble a memory quilt or rag-tie rugs from clothing and other fabrics that hold special meaning.
- Elevate to an art the display of images and added messages through a keepsake scrapbook.
- Create a cookbook of favorites, complete with stories associated with the food or the person whose recipe it is.
- Dig through old letters and journals to compile a revealing snapshot of someone's life in the past.

Publishing well-organized snippets makes it much easier to read through than the originals.

- Arrange artifacts for display inside a shadow box or coffee table with a glass top. Other variations on the theme include memory cubes (like a glass box on your desk) and snow globes.
- Interview your subject to understand him or her better, and to save the stories, voices, and faces for the future. The end result can be audio recordings, video, or a written memoir complete with photos. Online publishing services make custom books easy to make.
- Create a holiday ornament from something personal, such as a loved one's costume jewelry. These treasures could be hung on a tree, in a window or on a display stand to be enjoyed year-round.

